

## Love, desire and danger compose 'Lust, Caution'

Composer Alexandre Desplat on Ang Lee, collaboration, and evoking danger and despair through music.



Composer Alexandre Desplat restrained his orchestrations so as not to distract from the character or scene. (Chan Kam Chuen / Focus Features)

By Alexandre Desplat, Special To The Times

*December 5, 2007*

In our first conversation, director Ang Lee mentioned two of the most prolific film composers of the 1940s: Franz Waxman and Roy Webb. Waxman has always been a major influence on me. His scores to "Rebecca," "A Place in the Sun" and "Sunset Boulevard" are on my "short list" of best soundtracks. I knew Webb for his scores to "Notorious" and "Cat People."

Although the scores of that period often used large symphonic orchestrations and lush lyrical melodies featuring virtuoso piano parts, occasionally, an intriguing, rather minimal and inventive combination of instruments would emerge in a film score of that period, like the more intimate music Bernard Herrmann created in "The Ghost and Mrs. Muir." That was also an influence on my score.

Once "Lust, Caution" was edited, Ang and I both felt strongly that too much music and too big an orchestra might hurt the story by pushing the emotions too much. We decided to aim in a more intimate direction, focusing on the characters and their story, rather than the wider panorama of the world and events that surrounded them. We kept the 1940s flavor of Waxman and Webb, but not their overall structure or sound. I tried to keep the necessary themes of love, desire and danger in the score, but with a slightly more modern approach that gave the impression that the story was actually unfolding before the audience's eyes in "real time." I kept my orchestrations restrained -- string quartet, harp, vibraphone, flute, solo violin and electric cello -- to avoid any artifice or distraction.

I tried to evoke a sense of danger, despair and sorrow in the music, but I avoided sentimentality and generic "sexy, jazzy" music. Above all, I avoided any obvious Asian musical references. Even though the movie takes place in China in the 1940s, most of the Chinese films of that era used Occidental music scores.